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ABSTRACT

To investigate whether "USA Today" emphasizes "good news" over "bad news," a study was conducted using 10 randomly selected adults in State College, Pennsylvania, over an 11-week period in 1985. Subjects were asked to rate 248 stories over 45 pages of main news columns in 10 issues on a scale ranging from 1 (very negative news) to 7 (very positive news). In a further attempt to establish intercoder reliability, the 7-point tabulation was condensed into a 3-point tabulation using only bad, neutral, and good news as a basis for comparison. Subjects were also asked to categorize stories according to length, position on the page, the page on which they appeared and whether they were accompanied by pictures or other illustrations. Results seem to offer strong support for one key tenet of the hypothesis that "USA Today" is a "happy news" newspaper that concentrates on positive news rather than on negative news by the way stories are positioned in the paper. Other findings were inconclusive. (Seven data tables, instructions to coders, a sample questionnaire, and a coder profile are included.) (NKA)

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USA Today: Accentuating The Positive

A Study of the Gannett Flagship Newspaper

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Presented at

The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication

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Norman, Oklahoma

(This study was conducted while the author was a teaching fellow in the School of Communications at The Pennsylvania State University.)

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You got to ac-cent-tchu-ate the positive...spread joy to the maximum, bring gloom down to the minimum...

-Ac-Cent-Tchu-Ate The Positive

The study seeks to make a quantitative contribution to the debate among news media professionals as to whether USA Today is a "happy-news" newspaper--one that emphasizes positive news and de-emphasizes negative news--as many of them perceive the newspaper to be. In so doing, this content analysis of the newspaper may be seen to contribute to the larger debate surrounding the public's purported perception of the U.S. media as a purveyor of bad news at the expense of good news and whether the media should present a more balanced mixture of the two.

The more fundamental issue as to what constitutes news and the media's responsibility to keep the public informed of the inordinate and often adverse developments in the world is left to another arena where logic might prevail in a way that so far seems to have eluded the debate.

The study, in what is probably the most important measurement in such an analysis, lends significant support to USA Today's image as a "happy-news" newspaper. But in another important sense, the notion is not supported.

The study also points up the difficulty in quantifying commodities subject to such subjective measurement as "good" and "bad" news stories are with the degree of validity and reliability a conclusive analysis demands.

Literature Review

In Recent years, a measure of popularity has accrued to the idea that the news media unduly traffic in negative news and thus paint a distorted view of a world that, by and large and by most measures, is far from the accursed planet the media often seem to suggest it is.

The notion of a press obsessed with the negative side of life has gained prominence largely through the pronouncements of public figures at or near the pinnacle of power in the country.

Spiro Agnew attacked the press as "nattering nabobs of negativism" (1969). Agnew was later forced from the vice presidency in a bribery scandal, but the notion of excessive media negativism that he and other members of the Nixon administration fostered took hold in some corners of the national psyche. The idea gained more currency as officials in succeeding, mainly conservative administrations picked up the theme. White House spokesman Larry Speakes, displeased with media coverage of the Reagan administration, suggested that the major television networks needed a "good-news program" on their nightly news shows (1983).

The fact that such criticism of the media often stems from from what officials perceive to be unfair coverage of their own administrations does not seem to have tempered the zeal with which some members of the public have subscribed to the idea of a media prone to over-emphasize the ills of the world.

The debate has spawned a number of studies aimed at measuring the amount of bad news and good news the media present to the public, as well as studies dealing with the public's view of the issue.

Hartung and Stone reported that of eight southern California daily newspapers studied, five carried more bad news than good news on page one, but that good news predominated on the inside pages of seven of the newspapers (1980). Stone and Grusin determined that there was a heavy emphasis on bad news on the weeknight early television newscasts of the three major networks, NBC, CBS and ABC (1984). Haskins found a growing wave of public perception that there is "too much bad news," that the news media report more bad news than good news and give bad news more prominent display and thus present a negatively distorted picture of reality, and that negative news has negative effects on the audience's mood, attitude and behavior towards others, and is harmful to the image of the newspaper presenting it (1980-84).[1]

USA Today was selected as the focus of the study because it is generally perceived within and without the news profession as an unabashed proponent of the idea that good news ought to be given at least the same prominence as bad news, whatever the relative importance of the good tidings may be. Although that philosophy is practiced at a growing number of newspapers and broadcast stations--mainly in medium and smaller-size communities--most other news organizations continue to adhere to the traditional practice of giving overriding prominence to the major and often negative news of the day.

Allen H. Neuharth, chairman of the Gannett Co., which publishes USA Today, spelled out the equal-treatment philosophy in a speech at a convention of the Inland Daily Press Association (1985). He said readers expect newspapers to "present all the news in the particular arena in which we play. That means the good as well as the bad, the glad as well as the sad. They want reading their newspaper to be as enjoyable an experience as watching television."

A literature search turned up no previous studies of USA Today on the good-bad news question. But a regular reading of the newspaper since the first edition was published in September 1982 seemed to suggest not only a strict adherence to the Neuharth "glad-as-well-as-the-sad" principle but a pattern of emphasizing good news over bad news by positioning good-news stories more prominently, publishing more good news than bad news, and, in one instance, emphasizing a government report that U.S. incomes had increased while downplaying the report's finding that poverty had also increased (1984).

It was the newspaper's handling of the income-poverty report in a lead, page-one article, more than any other single factor, that prompted this study. The first six paragraphs of the article--headlined "1st real income gain in 4 years"--dwelled on a U.S. Census Bureau report that the median income for various groups in the United State in 1983 had increased between 1.4 and 3.3. percent over the previous year. Not until the seventh paragraph did readers learn that the same report also said that the national poverty rate reached 15.2 percent of the population

that year, its highest level in 18 years, meaning that 35.2 million persons were living below the official poverty line. The newspaper did not inform readers until the 12th and last paragraph that one in four children under the age of six were living in poverty and that the poverty rate for black children in that age group was one in two and more than one in three for Hispanic children. The article made no mention of the Bureau's findings that the poverty rate for children under the age of six rose from 23.8 percent in 1982 to 25 percent in 1983, meaning there were 5.3 million children living in poverty in the U.S. that year.

By contrast, both the New York Times and the Washington Post carried page-one stories the same day leading with the increase in poverty in the country and including the percentage statistics on child poverty that USA Today did not publish.

Both the impressions that USA Today publishes more good news than bad news or positions good-news stories more prominently would have to be supported statistically to fully substantiate the hypothesis that it is, undoubtedly, a "happy-news" newspaper. However, support for either one of these impressions would still provide a significant measure of support for the hypothesis.

Method

The study was designed to measure the quantity, positioning and illustration of bad-news and good-news stories in USA Today over a randomly selected period.

The study covered the main news sections of 10 issues of the newspaper randomly selected from an 11-week period in 1985 (Aug. 26 to Nov. 4), which was itself randomly selected. Weaver's

table of random numbers was used for the selection process. The study was confined to the main news sections because it was felt that the other sections of the newspaper (Money, Sports and Life) would not lend themselves to meaningful coding of news in a bad-news, good-news context.

In all, coders were asked to rate 248 stories over 45 pages. Coders were instructed to rate only stories that appeared in the main news columns, disregarding general and regional news briefs, and the Opinion and Weather pages. To improve coder compliance, stories that were to be excluded were crossed out.

The coders for the study were 10 residents of State College, Penn., divided evenly between the two sexes, two age groups (18-35, 36-50) and two education groups (high school graduates, college graduates).

Coders were asked to rate stories according to a seven-point interval scale setting forth degrees of good and bad news and a neutral category for stories that did not fall on either side of the spectrum. The scale was as follows:

1) Extremely bad news
2) Very bad news
3) Slighty bad news
4) Neutral news
5) Slightly good news
6) Very good news
7) Extremely good news

The scale was devised by Haskins and other researchers to provide what they said would be a more precise definition of the concepts of the degrees of bad and good news than those used in earlier studies (Haskins, Mill, Quarles, 1985).

Coder instructions, using the same news definitions employed in devising the scale, defined bad news as "new information about any event that would be interpreted by most people as negative, unpleasant, critical, conflictual, unhealthy, unwholesome, gruesome, disagreeable, anti-social, deceitful, destructive, painful, injurious, problem-creating, troublesome, fear-provoking, abusive, deteriorative, or anything else as normally perceived as an unpleasant event."

Good news was defined as "any event that would be interpreted by most people as expressing things positive, pleasant, humorous, agreeable, healthy, wholesome, constructive, healing, favorable, sharing, helping, cooperative, altruistic, expressing affection, sympathetic, reassuring, positive new discovery, an improving trend, or anything else normally perceived as a pleasant event."

The decision to employ the scale was based on what appeared to be a convincing claim by its creators that it had stood the tests of intercoder and intracoder reliability, with the 18 coders used to devise the scale arriving at "remarkably consistent" opinions among themselves and on different occasions as to how they felt the varying degrees of good and bad news would be interpreted by "most people."

Coders in the present study were also asked to categorize stories according to length, position on the page, the page on which they appeared and whether they were accompanied by pictures or other illustrations. To lessen the chance of coder bias, coders were not told the purpose of the study.

Preparing Data

In preparing data for analysis using the SPSS-X program, the following variables were established: 1) story groups to test for intercoder reliability, 2) identity of each coder, 3) the page on which the story appeared, 4) the date of the issue, 5) the news category (NCAT) of the stories coded based on the seven-point good-bad-news scale, 6) the length of the story, 7) whether there was a picture or other graphics with the story, 8) the position of the story on the page, and 9) the sex of the coder.

A "missing values" command was established to allow for coder omissions, with different numerical values signifying missing variables for news category, length, picture, position, date and page.

Character and value labels were established for the news scale, story length and position, whether the story had pictures or other graphics, and the sex of the coder.

Intercoder Reliability

In establishing a group variable to determine intercoder reliability, two groups of the same stories from all 10 issues were established, one group having been coded by one group of coders and the other by another group of coders. The purpose was to determine whether different coders rated the same stories the

same or nearly the same way, thus establishing intercoder reliability.

A cross-tabulation by group using the seven-point good-bad news scale showed significant differences between the way the two groups coded the same stories in the more pronounced categories, thus indicating a lack of intercoder reliability in those areas (table 1).

In a further attempt to establish intercoder reliability, the seven-point tabulation was condensed into a three-point tabulation using only bad, neutral and good news as a basis for comparison (table 2). The condensed tabulation combined the extremely good, very good and slightly good values into one basic good-news category. The same was done with the values on the negative side of the scale to create one bad-news category. The neutral category was left unchanged.

The rationale for condensing the seven-point scale was that whereas the outer areas of the scale demonstrated marked differences in the way the two groups coded the same stories in those categories, coding was closely similar in the other categories, indicating a strong measure of intercoder reliability in those areas. The condensed cross-tabulation showed very little difference between the two groups in all three categories and it was felt that this established a sufficient basis for generating valid findings from the study.

FILE: USA OUTPUT2 A

Table 1

CROSSTABULATION OF
BAD-GOOD NEWS SCALE(NEWS) BY GROUP

NEWS	COUNT / ROW PCT / COL PCT / TOT PCT	GROUP 1.00	GROUP 2.00	ROW TOTAL
1.00 EXTREMELY BAD		7	13	20
		35.0	65.0	3.9
		2.7	5.2	
		1.4	2.5	
2.00 VERY BAD		33	43	76
		43.4	56.6	14.8
		12.5	17.2	
		6.4	8.4	
3.00 SLIGHTLY BAD		55	48	103
		53.4	46.6	20.1
		20.9	19.2	
		10.7	9.4	
4.00 NEUTRAL		48	52	100
		48.0	52.0	19.5
		18.3	20.8	
		9.4	10.1	
5.00 SLIGHTLY GOOD		58	56	114
		50.9	49.1	22.2
		22.1	22.4	
		11.3	10.9	
6.00 VERY GOOD		58	28	86
		67.4	32.6	16.8
		22.1	11.2	
		11.3	5.5	
7.00 EXTREMELY GOOD		4	10	14
		28.6	71.4	2.7
		1.5	4.0	
		.8	1.9	
COLUMN TOTAL		263	250	513
		51.3	48.7	100.0

CHI-SQUARE	D.F.	SIGNIFICANCE	MIN E.F.	CELLS WITH E.F.< 5
16.50431	6	0.0113	6.823	NONE

FILE: USA OUTPUT2 A

Table 2

CROSSTABULATION OF
CATEGORIZED BAD-GOOD NEWS SCALE(NCAT) BY GROUP

NCAT	COUNT / ROW PCT / COL PCT / TOT PCT	GROUP 1.00	GROUP 2.00	ROW TOTAL
1.00 BAD	COUNT	95	104	199
	ROW PCT	47.7	52.3	38.8
	COL PCT	36.1	41.6	
	TOT PCT	18.5	20.3	
2.00 NEUTRAL	COUNT	48	52	100
	ROW PCT	48.0	52.0	19.5
	COL PCT	18.3	20.8	
	TOT PCT	9.4	10.1	
3.00 GOOD	COUNT	120	94	214
	ROW PCT	56.1	43.9	41.7
	COL PCT	45.6	37.6	
	TOT PCT	23.4	18.3	
COLUMN TOTAL		263	250	513
		51.3	48.7	100.0

CHI-SQUARE	D.F.	SIGNIFICANCE	MIN E.F.	CELLS WITH E.F.< 5
3.39866	2	0.1828	48.733	NONE

Findings

The most significant support for the notion that USA Today emphasizes good news over bad news emerged in the way stories were positioned.

A cross-tabulation using the condensed scale showed that the percentage of positive-news stories which began above the center fold of the pages was significantly higher than that of negative-news stories in the upper sections of the newspaper (table 3). Of the stories coded, 57.4 percent of the good-news stories began on the top half of the pages while only 31.9 percent of the bad-news stories began above the fold. The remaining 68 percent of the bad-news stories appeared on the bottom half or middle section (headline touched the fold) of the pages surveyed.

However, a frequency table and bar chart using the condensed scale showed very little difference in the number of positive and negative news stories in the newspaper (table 4). The percentages of good-news (41.7) and bad-news stories (38.8) were almost the same, with the remaining 19.5 stories coded in the neutral category.

No real significance emerged in the difference in length of bad and good-news stories, although in a slight trend away from the hypothesis, bad-news stories tended to run longer than good-news items (table 5). There was also little difference in use of pictures and other graphics to illustrate bad and good-news stories, although the newspaper's editors showed an inclination to illustrate good-news stories more than they did bad-news articles (table 6).

FILE: USA OUTPUT2 A

Table 3

CROSSTABULATION OF
CATEGORIZED BAD-GOOD NEWS SCALE(NCAT) BY POSITION OF STORY ON PAGE

NCAT	COUNT / ROW PCT / COL PCT / TOT PCT	POSITION TOP RIGHT 1.00	TOP LEFT 2.00	MIDDLE 3.00	BOTTOM 4.00	ROW TOTAL
BAD	1.00	42	20	48	84	194
		21.6	10.3	24.7	43.3	38.6
		27.8	27.8	42.9	50.3	
		8.4	4.0	9.6	16.7	
NEUTRAL	2.00	27	13	24	33	97
		27.8	13.4	24.7	34.0	19.3
		17.9	18.1	21.4	19.8	
		5.4	2.6	4.8	6.6	
GOOD	3.00	82	39	40	50	211
		38.9	18.5	19.0	23.7	42.0
		54.3	54.2	35.7	29.9	
		16.3	7.8	8.0	10.0	
	COLUMN TOTAL	151	72	112	167	502
		30.1	14.3	22.3	33.3	100.0

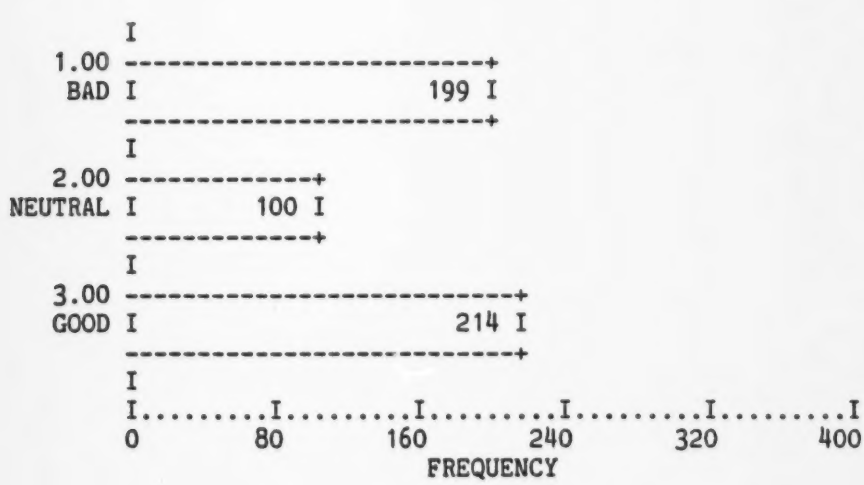
CHI-SQUARE	D.F.	SIGNIFICANCE	MIN E.F.	CELLS WITH E.F.< 5
28.46921	6	0.0001	13.912	NONE

FILE: USA OUTPUT1 A

Table 4 ~~3~~

NCAT CATEGORIZED BAD-GOOD NEWS SCALE

VALUE LABEL	VALUE	FREQUENCY	PERCENT	VALID PERCENT	CUM PERCENT
BAD	1.00	199	38.8	38.8	38.8
NEUTRAL	2.00	100	19.5	19.5	58.3
GOOD	3.00	214	41.7	41.7	100.0
	TOTAL	513	100.0	100.0	



FILE: USA OUTPUT2 A

Table 5

CROSSTABULATION OF
CATEGORIZED BAD-GOOD NEWS SCALE(NCAT) BY LENGTH OF STORY

NCAT	COUNT / ROW PCT / COL PCT / TOT PCT	LENGTH LONG 1.00	MEDIUM 2.00	SHORT 3.00	ROW TOTAL
1.00		44	113	40	197
BAD		22.3	57.4	20.3	38.8
		45.4	38.6	33.9	
		8.7	22.2	7.9	
2.00		19	54	26	99
NEUTRAL		19.2	54.5	26.3	19.5
		19.6	18.4	22.0	
		3.7	10.6	5.1	
3.00		34	126	52	212
GOOD		16.0	59.4	24.5	41.7
		35.1	43.0	44.1	
		6.7	24.8	10.2	
COLUMN TOTAL		97	293	118	508
		19.1	57.7	23.2	100.0

CHI-SQUARE	D.F.	SIGNIFICANCE	MIN E.F.	CELLS WITH E.F.< 5
3.67815	4	0.4513	18.904	NONE

FILE: USA OUTPUT2 A

Table 6

CROSSTABULATION OF
CATEGORIZED BAD-GOOD NEWS SCALE(NCAT) BY PICTURE WITH THE STORY?

NCAT	COUNT / ROW PCT / COL PCT / TOT PCT	PICTURE YES 1.00	PICTURE NO 2.00	ROW TOTAL
1.00 BAD		71	124	195
		36.4	63.6	38.8
		40.6	37.8	
		14.1	24.7	
2.00 NEUTRAL		28	68	96
		29.2	70.8	19.1
		16.0	20.7	
		5.6	13.5	
3.00 GOOD		76	136	212
		35.8	64.2	42.1
		43.4	41.5	
		15.1	27.0	
	COLUMN TOTAL	175	328	503
		34.8	65.2	100.0

CHI-SQUARE	D.F.	SIGNIFICANCE	MIN E.F.	CELLS WITH E.F.< 5
1.66854	2	0.4342	33.400	NONE

A marked difference in the way females and males coded stories in the outer reaches of the seven-point scale emerged. A cross-tabulation of the stories coded by each sex showed that females rated 85 percent of the stories coded as extremely bad and 71.4 percent of the stories coded as extremely good while males coded only 15 percent of the extremely bad stories and 28.6 percent of the extremely good stories (table 7).

The study pointed up no significant difference in the distribution of positive and negative-news stories throughout the main news section. In other words, there was no discernible tendency to front-page one category of news while burying the opposite category inside the newspaper.

Conclusions

The study would seem to offer strong support for one key tenet of the hypothesis: that USA Today, by and large, emphasizes positive news over negative news by the way stories are positioned in the newspaper. Although the study produced no support for the other component of the hypothesis--that the newspaper publishes more good news than bad news--where good and bad news is displayed in a newspaper is seen to be more significant than how much is published in judging a newspaper's good news-bad news philosophy. If this is true, then the page layouts of USA Today, in the words of a popular swing-era song, are clearly designed to "ac-cent-tchu-ate the positive" in presenting the news.

However much "traditionalists" in the news media feel the public is more interested in what goes wrong in the world than

FILE: USA OUTPUT2 A

Table 7

CROSSTABULATION OF
BAD-GOOD NEWS SCALE(NEWS) BY SEX

NEWS	SEX: MALE (1.00)	SEX: FEMALE (2.00)	ROW TOTAL
1.00 EXTREMELY BAD	3	17	20
	15.0	85.0	3.9
	1.0	7.9	
	.6	3.3	
2.00 VERY BAD	41	35	76
	53.9	46.1	14.8
	13.8	16.3	
	8.0	6.8	
3.00 SLIGHTLY BAD	56	47	103
	54.4	45.6	20.1
	18.8	21.9	
	10.9	9.2	
4.00 NEUTRAL	75	25	100
	75.0	25.0	19.5
	25.2	11.6	
	14.6	4.9	
5.00 SLIGHTLY GOOD	79	35	114
	69.3	30.7	22.2
	26.5	16.3	
	15.4	6.8	
6.00 VERY GOOD	40	46	86
	46.5	53.5	16.8
	13.4	21.4	
	7.8	9.0	
7.00 EXTREMELY GOOD	4	10	14
	28.6	71.4	2.7
	1.3	4.7	
	.8	1.9	
COLUMN TOTAL	298	215	513
	58.1	41.9	100.0

CHI-SQUARE	D.F.	SIGNIFICANCE	MIN E.F.	CELLS WITH E.F.< 5
43.74895	6	0.0000	5.867	NONE

what goes right, the USA Today formula of emphasizing good news does not seem to find disfavor with readers. The newspaper now has the third largest circulation (1.3 million) in the nation, behind only the Wall Street Journal and the New York Daily News (1985). However, it is not clear whether readers buy the newspaper for its emphasis on good news, its "quick-read" format or for other reasons.

The failure to achieve intercoder reliability using the seven-point good-bad news scale could stem from a variety of factors, including the degree of subjectivity that inevitably enters into such a measurement and the marked differences in the way male and female coders rated the same stories in the outer reaches of the scale. However, condensing tables using the seven-point scale into three-point tables was seen to be a valid way to achieve intercoder reliability and to provide a valid statistical basis for findings and conclusions.

The findings from the condensed tables were supported by a reading of the sample issues after the statistics and findings were compiled. This showed a pronounced pattern of emphasizing positive news and de-emphasizing negative news by positioning stories on the page. For example, in one issue, the lead story in the top half of page one was an article reporting on special programming television networks were offering to improve ratings, whereas the day's most troubling news--U.S.-Soviet tension over a Soviet defector--appeared below the fold (1985). In another issue, a story reporting that gasoline prices were starting to decline appeared on the top half of page one while a story on the increase in capital punishment in the country was relegated to

the bottom half of the page (1985).

#

Endnotes

Page 1

Ac-cent-tchu-ate The Positive, copyright 1984, Harwood Music Corp., used with permission.

Page 2

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Exhibits

USA Today

Page 1

Aug. 3, 1984

1st real income gain in 4 years

Aug. 3-84

By Tim Schreiner
USA TODAY

Americans' income gained against inflation in 1983, the first time in four years, the Census Bureau said Thursday.

Median family income was $24,580, which — when adjusted for inflation — meant a real gain of 1.6 percent from 1982.

The increase "can be attributed to the economy improving between 1982 and 1983," said the bureau's Gordon Green.

The report also shows:

- Median income for whites rose 1.4 percent ($363) to $25,757; blacks, up 3.3 percent ($471) to $14,506; Hispanics, up 1.2 percent ($207) to $16,956.
- Income for women working full-time rose 2.7 percent, from $13,663 to $14,479; for men, it rose 0.7 percent, from $21,655 to $22,508.
- Growth was highest in the Northeast, up 3.7 percent to $26,678. In the Midwest, down 1.1 percent to $24,730; South, up 1.4 percent to $22,495; West, up 0.7 percent to $25,592.

The report also said more than 35.2 million people — 15.2 percent of us — lived in poverty in 1983, up 870,000 over 1982 and highest since 1960.

The 1983 poverty level was $10,178 for a family of four.

The report shows that:

- The Midwest poverty rate rose from 13.3 to 14.6 percent. It fell from 18.1 to 17.2 percent in the South and was stable in the Northeast (13.4 percent) and West (14.7 percent).
- The rate for the elderly was 14.1, down from 1982 and only the second time it was below the national average.
- The rate for whites rose from 12.0 to 12.1; blacks, 35.6 to 35.7 percent; Hispanics fell from 29.9 to 28.4 percent.
- One in four children under age 6 now lives in poverty; it's one in two of black children, and more than one in three Hispanic children.

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USA Today Survey

Instructions to Coders

Please read and judge the nature of all unmarked stories (stories that have not been crossed out) on the pages provided according to the following scale:

1) Extremely bad news
2) Very bad news
3) Slightly bad news
4) Neutral news
5) Slightly good news
6) Very good news
7) Extremely good news

For the purpose of this survey, the definitions of the categories are as follows:

Bad news: new information about any event that would be interpreted by most people as negative, unpleasant, critical, conflictual, unhealthy, unwholesome, gruesome, disagreeable, anti-social, deceitful, destructive, painful, injurious, socially or individually problem-creating, troublesome, verbally or physically fear-provoking, abusive, deteriorative or declining, or anything else normally perceived as an unpleasant event.

Good news: news of any event interpreted by most people as expressing things positive, pleasant, humourous, agreeable, pro-social, healthy, wholesome, constructive, healing, favorable, sharing, helping, cooperative, altruistic (concerned for the welfare of others), expressing affection, sympathetic, reassuring, positive new discovery, an improving trend, or anything else normally perceived as a pleasant event.

Judge the stories according to their varying degrees of goodness and badness according to the scale (above).

Classify stories as neutral only if absolutely no negative or positive tone is perceived, or if negative and positive interpretations seem absolutely balanced.

Use the attached forms to record your opinions.

Please do not place any marks on the newspaper pages.

Answer the supplemental question LAST (do not read it until you get to it).

Complete the Complete the Coder Profile (attached)

USA Today Survey

Questionnaire

Story title _____ Page No. _____
(first two words of headline)

Date of issue _____

Instructions: In selecting a news category, circle only the number of the category. In replying to other questions, circle only the letter of your answer.

News categories

1) Extremely bad

2) Very bad

3) Slightly bad

4) Neutral

5) Slightly good

6) Very good

7) Extremely good

Length

a) Long (10 or more paras)

b) Medium (5 to 9 paras)

c) Short (4 or less paras)

Picture

a) Yes

b) No

Headline position on page

a) Top right (above the fold)

b) Top left (above the fold)

c) Middle (touching the fold)

d) Bottom (below the fold

USA Today Survey

Coder Profile

Name (please print) _____

Age _____

Sex: M F (circle)

Academic concentration _____

Year at university _____

School address _____

_____

_____

Telephone: _____